

BIBLICAL FAITH VS. COUNTERFEIT

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The following article by Dr. Ronald E. Williams is from "Hephzibah Happenings," April 2003:

In the deepening apostasy in which we are living, there are myriads of counterfeit forms of true religion. These seductive forms of fraudulent religion saw their seminal forms as early as the antediluvian Patriarchs, but have prodigiously multiplied and expanded in these last days.

Whereas pristine, New Testament Christianity drew a sharp contrast between an unregenerate and regenerate life, these last days have witnessed a shallow facsimile of true faith, emphasizing hollow forms, attractive externals, and self-satisfying activities and works. These empty shells of supposed faith have produced adherents who cannot always be easily distinguished from the world.

Satanic Murder

Satanic attacks on genuine faith were murderous during the early centuries of the church. Successive Roman emperors were assiduous in persecuting the early church, and multitudes of believers were tortured, imprisoned, enslaved and executed. Many of these executions were barbarous, purposefully done to shock and terrify.

Satanic Mixture

However, Satanic attacks are not always so bloody and murderous, but take on a sinister character of distortion, error and mixture. This phenomenon has predominated in modern centuries in the Western world and has produced a weak, vapid church, devoid of power, salt and light.

Many historic Christian denominations are illustrative of this latter-day Satanic dilution of purity. Sometimes called "modernism" or "liberalism", this movement has so completely left its moorings of Biblical orthodoxy, that it has in reality become a mortal enemy of Biblical faith. These groups are predominantly represented in the National Council of Churches and World Council of Churches.

What a startling aberration to see supposed religious guides in these groups promoting the acceptance of Sodomy, abortion, women pastors, serial marriages, socialism and other positions antithetical to Biblical faith. To these spiritually blind religious leaders, the Bible is quaint Jewish history, a commentary of ethics and morals, but not the authoritative Word of the Living God! These charlatans are a living illustration of Paul's words: "Having a form of godliness, but

denying the power thereof: from such turn away" (2 Tim. 3:5).

It does not take great discernment to see the duplicity and hypocrisy of these religious frauds. They are in many ways are (sic) the modern counterpart of the religious hierarchy who became the implacable, bitter enemies of the Lord Jesus in the days of His earthly ministry. So has it been since God revealed Himself to man; a large segment of humanity seizes on the husk and shell of religion, never being animated by its life-giving, soul-changing core of revealed truth. But (sic) way of contrast, a small remnant of souls, regenerated by guileless, whole-hearted acceptance of God's truth and person, became the objects of scorn, hatred and ridicule from the larger unregenerate majority.

When our Lord Jesus posed the enigmatic question: "... when the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8), the clear implication is that *"the faith"* will be an endangered species, and will be relatively rare.

Enormous Buildings--Empty Souls

In this light, consider the contemporary "church growth movement." Many churches have been seduced by the siren call of mass marketing, "contemporary services," "charismatic gifts," strobe lights, contemporary music, rock music, plays, dances, ballets, etc., all to secure as large a crowd as possible. But at what price? To shamelessly pander to the lower nature of man and titillate his sensual, carnal nature is an affront to a Holy God! One may well fill Laodicean Crystal Cathedrals and enormous multi-plexes with teeming masses, and assuage their conscience with religious dramas, emotional "worship" services and superficial, psychological "feel good" messages, but to what eternal good?

Rather than being confronted with the holiness of the eternal God and the absolute wretched, depraved nature of my heart, I will leave such services with a mollified conscience. I would be satisfied that I have been "religious," and have "worshiped God," while at the same time living in satisfaction with my unregenerate, carnal life.

Foibles in Fundamentalism

Authentic believers are right to look with disdain on such worldly methods and New Evangelical compromises. But what of our own ranks? Through our own compromises with truth and God's righteous standards, have we not filled our auditoriums with a mixed multitude?

Satan's incremental, insidious ploys are manifold and diverse. He is not only active in deceiving the liberal, the New Evangelical and the proponent of modern church growth, but the Fundamentalist as well.

The earnest saint of 100 years ago would be scandalized to attend worship at many of our modern churches! Compromise in dress, music, "Christian liberties," worship methods, etc.,

would horrify the saint of the last century. He would blink in unbelief at evangelists, missionaries, deacons and even Pastors who are not only tolerated, but enthusiastically accepted in those sacred offices though they are divorced and remarried, or who have married a divorced woman. He would wince in moral anguish at Pastors who do not pay their bills, who have tempers as flammable as gasoline, who have become Sultans instead of Shepherds, or who have purposely encouraged a cult of personality and hero-worship.

Through an emphasis on "love" and "acceptance," behavior that would have caused church discipline decades ago is now tolerated. In fact, our understanding of true Biblical love and the holiness and purity God enjoins is so shallow and superficial, that any church leader who insists on church discipline today is considered mean-spirited, hateful and unloving, rather than being commended and supported. By such compromise, "love and acceptance" have been emptied of their Biblical meaning, and it has become "sloppy agape." Paul's admonition is still meaningful: "and ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from you" (1 Cor. 5:2). The holiness and purity of God's church is just as important to Him now as it was in the first century, popular opinion notwithstanding.

Evidence, Not Words: Lessons From Dogs And Pigs

That words alone are cheap ought to be self-evident, but this is certainly emphasized by Scripture: "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." (2 Pet. 2:20-22). In this case, Peter uses the example of religious teachers who, though they be learned, intellectual and silver-tongued, were never truly born again of the Spirit of God. In their case, as is true of many, their "latter end" (1 Pet. 2:20) revealed their true nature and unregenerate character. In a readily comprehended lesson from nature, Peter explains that though a dog or swine be ever so trained, cleaned, dressed with the finest of external furbishments, they will both eventually regress to behavior characteristic of their true nature.

Satan Loves a Vacuum

Our Lord uses another striking figure to describe the false confessor: "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation" (Matt. 12:43-45). Some have denominated this man as the "formal hypocrite," the life in whom the devil still maintains a vested interest. In such a life, "the unclean spirit has gone out" but this is temporary, because he

was not loosed or cast out by means of genuine conversion.

The sweeping of a broom may remove large objects of contamination much as 'reformation' may rid a man of obvious sinful habits, but the putrid filth of original sin and a fallen nature remains though external garnishments and adornments of self-control attempt to beautify. Judas Iscariot did this. He feigned a confession of belief, lived a life externally consistent with that of a disciple, sweeping with the broom as it were, but never purging the leprosy of his heart. Common gifts and graces can be true of sons of perdition who are possessed of character: Pharaoh respected Moses, Balaam desired to do well, Cyrus made many good decisions and Pharisees had many commendable habits, but the true house of their life was never surrendered to Christ or inhabited by the Spirit.

The Consummate Hypocrite

Consider the final estate of the hypocrite (1 Pet. 2:26). The show, facade and shadow of false profession will ultimately be revealed and manifested. Powers of darkness enter in because they are welcomed; no difficulty or opposition is encountered. As one teacher explains, there they dwell, work and rule. The cloak of a visible, but false profession is finally removed through open sin that heretofore was secret and hidden in heart and mind. The breathtaking betrayal of Judas is a living portrayal of this principle. Though a constant companion of our Lord, and in intimate, fraternal fellowship with sincere disciples for three years, the house of his heart was only swept and garnished.

His cold-blooded, heinous betrayal of the Lamb of God is the last chapter of his hypocritical life. His horrible physical death as awful as it was is not to be compared to his last estate: eternal perdition.

A Mixed Multitude

In these perilous times, many tares are growing with the wheat. This is one explanation for the carnality, worldliness and compromise in fundamental churches. Viewed in this light, one can more readily understand the intractable and unteachable spirits of many professors, their resistance to pastoral authority and the call of God to lead a holy, separated life. Why are some who name the name of Christ leaving churches that are fighting the good fight of faith, and joining a "church" that is perfectly willing to pander to their lower nature? John explains, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us" (1 John 2:19). In other words, leaving light and truth in favor of this world is a revelation, a manifestation of a heart devoid of regenerating grace.

Biblical Conversion Yields Total Change

Though we are saved by the grace of God through repentance and faith, we testify to that

miraculous, supernatural conversion by a changed life: "we are ...created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Eph. 2: 10). A professor or confessor devoid of a changed life had best be concerned about his soul: "...faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone" (James 2:17); "For as the body without the Spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (James 2:26).

Though we are taught by our Lord we would know each other by our fruits (Matt. 7: 16), our judgment is imperfect and limited, whereas His is infinite and omniscient. Blatant rebels, who have brazenly cast off the light of truth in favor of a profligate life are not difficult to categorize. About others, where the situation is less egregious, one may have doubts (Judas' testimony was so externally convincing that eleven Jewish men elected him as their treasurer, though he was a secret thief), the Lord helps our judgment by prescribing self-diagnosis: "If we say we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness (habitual sin), we lie, and do not the truth" (1 John 1: 6). A sincere, seeking and humble heart will, through spiritual inventory of one's life, see rather clearly his standing with God.

Spiritual Inventory Indicated

This self-diagnosis is not complicated or difficult, and it reveals whether my profession of faith is authentic or spurious: "He that saith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4). If this phenomenon were not a problem, (lying about my salvation to the satisfaction of myself and others), the Lord would not have included it in the canon. Accordingly, this and related admonitions (1 John 2:9: 1 John 1:6, 8, 10; 1 John 4:20; James 2:14-16) stand as clarion warnings to self-deceived, self- professed "Christians" who have trusted in a false profession, but have never "turned from their idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9).

Our Lord's Sober Warning

That obedience to the will of God is crucial and that mere words are often false is highlighted by our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). Please note that the problem of a false profession is not an insignificant one. Our Lord says "*many*" (Matt. 7:22) will be self-deceived, as opposed to a few. Incidentally, these pretentious, assuming souls were not saved, then lost, etc., as our Arminian (sic) friends would suppose; our Lord says, "I *never* knew you" (Matt. 7:23).

The Genuine Minority

The authentic believer will be in a distinct minority: "few there be that find it" (Matt. 7:14); he will produce genuine fruit of faith and obedience;" "Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit" (Matt. 7:17); his profession of faith is sincere and life changing (Matt. 7:21-23); and he will be as the wise builder who builds his life of faith and obedience on the rock of Christ and His truth, as opposed to the false professor who builds

his life on the sands of self-will and rebellion (Matt. 7:24-27).

On the broad highway of life leading to destruction, there is "rush hour traffic," because most of this world is at war with God. However, on the straight and narrow path leading unto life, the way is daunting and arduous, and the path is lonely and fraught with perils.

Professing friend, if you are in the "main stream," and you blend easily in with this world and its ways, you had best beware of your spiritual condition. If your walk with God is often lonely, you are misunderstood and ridiculed, you sigh and grieve about the sin and degradation of this world, and you yearn for conformity to the image of Christ, be encouraged. This was the lot of the prophets and is your badge of honor (2 Tim. 3:12).

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